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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4883
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1031
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9803
RUEHKKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4261
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1723
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3451
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0448
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 6900
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4516
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0841
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0844
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0541
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2787
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0429
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001065

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/26/2016
TAGS: PGOV PHUM PINS ASEC BM
SUBJECT: DISCORD AMONG BURMA'S KAREN INSURGENTS

REF: A. RANGOON 848

1B. RANGOON 698
1C. 05 RANGOON 614

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Classified By: Poloff Dean Tidwell for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The power vacuum created by the grave illness of Karen National Union (KNU) leader General Bo Mya has opened a serious split between the KNU and its armed faction, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). While the KNU feels pressured by exile groups to continue the fight, the KNLA's Brigadier Htay Maung recently opened a dialogue with the SPDC and appears eager to achieve a cease-fire agreement with the Burmese Army. The SPDC has asked the KNLA to stop their offensive in Hpapun district; the KNLA replied it cannot reach consensus among its far-flung brigades until the Burmese Army ends its offensive against the KNLA and Karen villages. END SUMMARY.

UNAUTHORIZED MEDIVAC TO RANGOON

12. (C) According to Rangoon-based Karen physicians Rebecca Dee and Simon Tha (PROTECT), a recent attempt by KNU leader General Bo Mya to receive "medical treatment" in Rangoon revealed a serious divide between the KNU and the KNLA. Dr. Simon told poloff that a former KNU Deputy Foreign Minister, known as Pastor Timothy, colluded with three top SPDC officials to mastermind a plan to send Bo Mya to Rangoon for "medical treatment." The Karen physicians had been asked by a KNLA officer and Lt. Col. Mya Htun Oo of SPDC's Military Service Affairs to accompany Bo Mya to Rangoon, but the plan fell through when KNU leaders learned about the plot and canceled the trip.

KNLA'S QUIET COUP

¶3. (C) When it became apparent that the KNU would not allow the general to travel to Rangoon, Dr. Simon was invited to join a meeting between Mya Htun Oo and Brigadier General Htay Maung, brother-in-law of Bo Mya and commander of the KNLA's 7th Brigade (ref C). The meeting revealed a serious rift between KNU politicians and KNU military officers. According to Dr. Simon, the battle-weary KNLA is keen to strike a durable cease-fire with the SPDC, while the KNU is under pressure from the exile community to maintain its aggressive stance against the regime. The KNLA prefers to negotiate a cease-fire first, and let the KNU negotiate a political settlement later.

¶4. (C) Htay Maung admitted that although Bo Mya is still alive, he is no longer able to lead. The KNU executive committee recently granted him "medical leave," which is unlikely to end any time soon. Htay Maung believes he must fill the power vacuum created by Bo Mya's departure from public life. According to Dr. Simon, he has decided to seek consensus of all KNLA brigade commanders and to then negotiate a cease-fire with the SPDC, with or without the consent of the KNU. Htay Maung reportedly met all his battalion commanders on July 18 and called another meeting of brigade commanders in late July to reach consensus on a cease-fire strategy.

CEASE-FIRE CONDITIONS

¶5. (C) Htay Maung told Mya Htun Oo the Burmese Army must stop fighting and give back some territory seized recently from KNLA forces (ref A). Without this, he claimed other Karen brigadiers would refuse to make peace. Mya Htun Oo responded that the KNLA needed to rein in the commander of KNLA's 5th Brigade, who is aggressively attacking Burmese Army positions in Karen State.

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¶6. (C) According to Dr. Simon, KNU General-Secretary Mahn Sha recently bypassed ailing General Bo Mya and gave orders to KNLA brigade commanders directly to step up attacks on the Burmese Army, using whatever means necessary, including mines and bombs, to disrupt the Burmese advance. Most KNLA brigadiers ignored the order, but the 5th Brigade commander has carried them out aggressively, reportedly planting bombs on rail lines and other targets (ref B). In late June the 5th Brigade allegedly destroyed the Burmese Army's Tactical Operation Center just south of Hpapun in a daring rocket attack.

COMMENT: KNU/KNLA UNITY FADING AS FAST AS BO MYA

¶7. (C) It is clear from this recent split that the KNLA is feeling the pressure of the recent Burmese Army offensive. For the past three decades, General Bo Mya, as both president of the KNU and commander-in-chief of the KNLA, managed to unite the Karen resistance. As Bo Mya's influence wanes, so does Karen unity. Direct orders by KNU leaders to field commanders, a result of Bo Mya's diminished status, appear to have caused the earlier "gentlemen's cease-fire" between the Burmese Army and the KNLA to breakdown in some brigades and has driven wedges between KNLA field commanders. While cease-fire negotiations between the regime and the KNU/KNLA have occurred off-and-on for decades, talks have often broken down and current efforts could again fizzle. Htay Maung is a veteran field commander with little time for political matters. He is unlikely to have the skills needed to unite both Karen military and politicians to successfully negotiate a comprehensive cease-fire with the SPDC. END COMMENT.

VILLAROSA